

Final Report
on
USAID/ICMA Local Government Course
“Cities Matter: Principles and Practices of Local Government”
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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the events related to the USAID/ICMA local government training program “Cities Matter: Principles and Practices of Local Government.” The course was offered March 9-13 in Annapolis, Maryland. Thirty-five USAID officials from the United States and 18 other countries attended the course.

The purpose of this report is to compare the expectations of the course to the outcomes and to recommend additional workshops to meet USAID's training needs in local government. The course was designed to assist USAID program staff to think strategically about strengthening local urban government in their regions. To do this, participants were introduced to the functions, forms and programs that support local government in the U.S., and then were given opportunities to apply the principles from the U.S. model to their own countries. Comparing the two models would allow the participant to identify what was missing in their own country's legal, social, political and administrative structures.

How well ICMA met the expectations of the course is the essence of this report. The first section is an overview of the goals and structure of the course. In Section 2, a brief summary of the participants' perspectives on the course is offered based on the evaluations completed at the end of the one-week training. Section 3 provides our general conclusions, and Section 4 outlines our recommendations. Course documents are included as annexes.

1. COURSE OVERVIEW

“cities, and not nations, are the true engines of economic growth”

JANE JACOB, URBANOLOGIST

In the second half of this century cities have emerged as important centers in the political and economic structure of a nation. They are where commerce, people, ideas, and culture converge, and it is the role of the local government to mediate this convergence. As such, local governments are active players in the overall governing process of a country, and they make a major contribution to its economic conditions. In short, *cities matter*.

The importance of local administration is being recognized in the context of the dismal conditions in many of the world's cities. The capacity of local government to address the challenges of providing basic services is fundamental. The failures of local administration are increasingly evident in many parts of the world, and the effects on issues ranging from public health to capital formation are becoming clearer.

Once empowered, cities, through their governing structures, can more effectively and efficiently deliver services, which in turn advances investment opportunities. The challenge is to encourage the development of local political and administrative structures that meet the demands of today's market economy while at the same time balancing the diverse needs of citizens and preserving the environment.

Meeting this challenge, vis-à-vis the process of decentralization, requires changing the lens through which we view the role of local governments -- moving from seeing them as *recipients* of political and economic reform to seeing them as *active partners* in the governing process.

The principles and practices of local government allow cities to advance democracy and capitalize on investment opportunities. But what are the best principles and practices? The following are key general characteristics found in any effective local government:

- Strong political, administrative, and economic leadership;
- Efficient administrative structure;
- Effective communication with citizens;
- Transparent fiscal practices that encourage investment and generate trust in the governing process;
- Decisions that incorporate the policy of environmental protection

Using the U.S. local government model and information from other countries, the course was designed to allow the participants to consider how cities in other parts of the world can become active partners in the governing process of the country.

The institutional history of local government in the United States has generated a sophisticated local system of governance that meshes with both State and Federal levels of government. It is recognized that nascent local governing units in many parts of the world do not have the capacity at this time to function at this level of sophistication. However, there is a logic to the governing process at the local level in the United States that makes it a good model. With this framework, one can explore how administrative structures and legal frameworks in other countries can be designed in order to develop more efficient and effective governing processes and use of resources.

The logic of local government in the United States suggests the following elements are necessary:

Effective structure vis-à-vis the central government level;

Effective administrative structure;

Transparent methods of communication that instill a sense of civic responsibility and pride in both governing officials and citizens;

Efficient budgetary and administrative systems;

Institutions that sustain local government officials and protect the principle of self-governance.

Each section of the course included a general presentation of how the above logic is institutionalized in this country. The participants were then given assignments that presented them with the challenge of applying the model to their own countries in a series of interactive workshops.

The goal was to have the participants leave the course with a general framework to enable them to better analyze current local government systems and determine appropriate points of donor intervention. On the last day of the course participants were asked to develop specific plans for applying what they learned in the course to circumstances in the countries in which they work.

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

To get as much feedback as possible in order to refine the program for the next iteration, a long evaluation form, eliciting views on each session, was used. Participants were not required to provide their names on the evaluation forms. The evaluation session was held at the end of the last day of classroom training, and included an opportunity for participants to offer verbal comments as well. To capture participant views about the fifth day field practicum a follow up E-mail was sent to each participant, about a third

of whom responded.

Participants were also asked to give an overall rating to the program on a scale of one to 10. The average rating was 7.8, with no one giving a rating lower than five.

Critical points that will be considered in planning the next course include:

Program goals and learning approach. Most participants felt that the learning approach of using largely a U.S. model as a point of reference to explore underlying local governance principles was effective. A few participants felt, however, that more clarity about the overall goals and the approach before and at the outset of the course would have been helpful.

Integrating overseas examples into the program. A number of participants felt that greater use of examples from overseas would have strengthened the program. This can easily be accomplished in further offerings of the course, since nearly all presenters have overseas experience.

Finance should continue to be a cornerstone of the program. This session got the best reviews. Nonetheless, a number of participants, especially those with very little finance background, would have wanted even more focus on finance.

Citizen participation needs to be strengthened and elongated. Due to scheduling adjustments, this session was shortchanged. Participants emphasized the importance of the subject matter and ensuring it is given proper attention in the future.

Use of “real life” examples. The use of these examples, irrespective of whether from the U.S. or overseas, was recognized by the participants as an important training technique. A number of presenters used the technique effectively, but a few did not.

Individual learning goals. There was some sentiment that the exercise by which each participant set his or her own learning goals for the program was not done effectively. Specifically, participants identified their personal goals but the program was not adjusted in any way to respond to these goals.

Start up and ending time. There was strong feeling that the start up (orientation, learning goals, etc.) of the program and the applications

session on the last classroom day were too long.

“Cities” versus local government. At least a few participants felt the focus was too urban and not enough on local government per se. These comments came from those participants involved in governance programs in largely rural areas.

FSN participants. Most FSN participants gave the program high marks. However some had difficulty with the terminology, being less familiar with the U.S. government system generally. Suggestions included developing a list of definitions and running a preparatory session for FSNs to familiarize them with U.S. systems and terminology.

Linkage to USAID policy and policy makers. A few participants would have liked some opportunity to interact with AID/W leadership to link the learning to current policies and programs of the Agency.

Field practicum. All three of the field practica were given positive reviews by the respondents. A number, however, suggested that the field practicum would be more effective if scheduled in the middle of the week rather than at the end. This would allow the participants to better incorporate the experience into their overall learning.

3. CONCLUSION The general conclusion is that this was a successful training program that should be offered again:

The subject matter clearly responds to a perceived need of a substantial number of USAID staff. A total of 54 staff applied for the program. This probably would have been greater had 1) the timing been more convenient, and 2) RUDO and housing specialist staff had not been discouraged from applying.

A quality training program for worldwide staff can be provided in this field using in large part the U.S. experience for organizing content.

Field study in the U.S. can be usefully integrated into the program.

Opportunities for worldwide and regional sharing of program experience can be well incorporated into the design.

FSNs can be trained alongside direct hire and PSC staff, but additional steps may be necessary to increase their benefit from the Program.

Transferring the concepts that define the U.S. model of local government to USAID staff members from all regions of the world presents a fundamental

challenge. There is a difference in the inherent knowledge of U.S. governmental practices of a U.S. citizen versus that of a foreign national. Therefore, it is important to be explicit about drawing the linkage between local government principles as communicated through a U.S. model, and how these principles are relevant to working with local governments under very different circumstances overseas.

Developing and maintaining local government institutions and systems is a process that results in programmatic outcomes. For example, developing sound budgetary practices that attract investment requires an understanding of the integration of fiscal, political and administrative systems, which must respond to the demands of the citizen or the private investor. It is important to recognize that the course is designed to elucidate this process rather than promote a specific programmatic outcome.

ICMA recognized the difficulty in taking general concepts and applying them to specific cases. Even though the course was designed to present models that could discipline one's thinking about a particular aspect of local government, there clearly were times when the linkage was difficult to make. Given this, ICMA will seek to define learning tasks that more readily allow the participant to extrapolate fundamental issues of the model and apply them to the situations they confront in their own countries. More regional and/or country specific case studies will be used to facilitate this goal.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Offer the program again in June. This would allow for the rapid refinement of the design while responding to known interest in the field. The program could then be offered twice yearly (winter and June).

Hold the next program either in Washington, D.C. or an immediate suburb. This will contain costs while allowing for more convenient options for the field practicum.

Encourage a number of housing and urban development specialists from within the Agency to attend so that their experiences might be incorporated into the program.

Retain the basic conceptual design and objectives of the program. Modifications should be made to the detailed design to respond to certain weaknesses noted by the staff and/or the participants in their course evaluations. Following are the major points to consider for the next

iteration of the course:

A. The learning approach. The approach is basically to use the U.S. local government experience to explore basic local governance issues. It does not promote the U.S. model nor suggest that there are not other ways to explore local governance. The approach remains valid, however it needs to be communicated more clearly in the initial announcement, course description, and graphics, and needs to be reinforced during the program.

B. Integrating overseas material into the program. A number of speakers could have drawn more heavily from their overseas experience. An effort should be made by all speakers to incorporate international perspectives into their presentations. A second consideration is for all speakers to effectively generalize from their presentations.

C. Citizen participation needs to be strengthened and elongated. In refining the program care should be made not to compromise the time devoted to this subject.

D. Bringing “real life” examples into the program. More attention should be given to ensure that each presenter integrates specific examples. This will continue to be important, especially for the FSN participants.

E. Lengthening and perhaps increasing the number of panel discussions. These should continue to be used as a critical way for participants to present their experiences. A concurrent panel approach should be retained.

F. Continue to use a pre-workshop assignment, but more clearly indicate how and where it will be integrated into the program.

G. “Cities” versus local government. The program should retain an urban orientation. Therefore it may not be appropriate for democratization specialists working in entirely rural settings.

H. Special attention to FSNs. In using a largely U.S. model,

the Americans logically start a step ahead. One approach to mitigate this problem is to build a common base of terminology. This could be done as an insert, and added to throughout the program. In addition, a special pre-workshop session on the American system of government/separation of powers/terminology could be conducted on Sunday for FSNs only.

I. Field practicum. Consideration should be given to improving the integration of the practicum with the classroom component of the program. The practicum could be scheduled for mid week. Multiple tracks would still be accommodated.

In additional to this core course, it would be appropriate to begin to conceptualize two additional offerings for later this year:

A more advanced program to explore in greater depth key issues in local government. One option is to have the program focus largely on finance.

Regional programs that could be geared to regional issues or at least include a critical mass of participants from only a few countries. This might include counterparts as well.